

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY (CFSA)

2008 Quick Reference Guide

Food Sensitivities in Young Children



Food allergies occur in 6-to-8 percent of children ages four and younger. Reactions (which vary from mild rashes to difficulty breathing) account for 30,000 emergency room visits a year. Tens of thousands of other reactions are treated at home. Currently, the only ways to manage food allergies are to avoid the foods that cause allergic reactions and to treat the symptoms. (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease)

Any food can cause a food allergy, but the following foods are the most common causes for allergic reactions in young children:

- Peanuts (often severe, and possibly fatal reactions)
- Tree nuts (walnuts, pistachios, pecans, cashews)
- Seeds (sesame)
- Cow's milk
- Processed meats (often containing milk products)
- Eggs
- Soy
- Wheat and other grains
- Seafood (fish, shellfish, and mollusks)

Although less common, allergies also occur from meats, fruits, and vegetables. **Note:** cooking meats and vegetables usually reduces the levels of allergens and allergic reactions (check with your doctor).

People with an allergy to meat may just react to one type, such as pork, beef, lamb, or chicken, or they may react to a range of types. The most common symptom of meat allergy is dermatitis (an allergic skin reaction).

The good news is that food allergies are often outgrown during early childhood. It is estimated that 80% to 90% of egg, milk, wheat, and soy allergies go away by age 5. Some allergies are more persistent, however. For example, only 1 in 5 young children will outgrow a peanut allergy and even fewer numbers of children will outgrow allergies to tree nuts or seafood. Your pediatrician or allergist can perform tests to track your child's food allergies to see if they are going away. (American Academy of Pediatrics)

The following suggestions are helpful for parents and others concerned with the health of young children:

- Know the most common food allergies/sensitivities in young children (see list above).
- Know the common signs of food sensitivities: Skin (hives, rash, swelling, and tongue soreness), Respiratory Passage (sneezing, runny nose, wheezing, and congestion), Intestines (abdominal discomfort, constipation, gassiness, vomiting), and Behavior (crying, irritability).
- If you notice that your child develops symptoms after being exposed to certain foods, then you should avoid those foods. Keeping a diary for a few weeks and recording what foods your child has been eating, especially new foods, and when he or she develops symptoms may help figure out what food item caused an allergic reaction. Children with more severe reactions should be evaluated by their pediatrician or an allergist.
- Do not give artificial sweeteners, unpasteurized dairy and juice, or honey (or foods made with honey) to young children.
- Infants should not be fed solid foods until they are six months old. When infants are six-to-twelve months old, vegetables, rice, meat, and fruit can be introduced to their diets. Each food should be introduced one at a time so parents or caregivers can identify and eliminate any foods that may cause a reaction. After the child is one year old, milk, wheat, corn, citrus and soy may be added. At two years of age, the child may have eggs. Finally, at age three, fish and peanuts may be introduced. (American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology)